Volume 8, Issue 35   Atari Online News, Etc.   September 1, 2006

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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A-ONE #0835   09/01/06

~ New Hatari Version Out ~ People Are Talking!   ~ Google Office Rival!
~ 'Botnet' Man Jailed!   ~ Browzar Keeps Privacy! ~ CTPCI News Update!

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-* India State Dumps Windows! *-
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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""

It's unbelievable, but Labor Day weekend is upon us already! For most of
us, this is the unofficial end of the summer. Unofficial because most
schools in the U.S. open next week; so for the kids, their summer vacation
is over! Me, I'm going to milk these last few weeks for all they're worth!
The best part of this time of the year is that it's cooler than the hot and
hazy days of July and August. It makes working outside more enjoyable as
far as I'm concerned. And, once I'm through with the last of my outdoor
projects (real soon now!), it will be cool enough to work inside and leave
the windows open and actually have that keep things cool without having to
use the air conditioning!

The down side of this time of year is that we'll close up the pool sometime
next week. We got a lot of use out of it this year, especially during those
unbearable humid days. And, being home during the day, I was able to take
advantage of it more often.

I guess I shouldn't complain too much. It was a great summer being semi-
retired all season. I managed to get things done that I never would have
found the time to do. And, it wasn't all work - I managed to relax and play
some golf almost once a week - something I haven't been able to do for over
30 years! While my game hasn't greatly improved, it's been really fun to
get out on the course fairly regularly. A guy could get used to this way of
life! Now if I could convince my wife to get a second job and put the dogs
to work somehow...

This past week, I saw a commercial for a television special coming up next
week to commemorate Star Trek's 40th anniversary! Can you believe that the
show debuted that long ago?! I wasn't even out of high school back then!
Wow! We hadn't even landed a man on the moon yet; and here we are today
downsizing Pluto and removing it as one of our nine planets. The times,
they are a-changin'!

Well, if you're like me, you're probably making last-minute plans for Labor
Day festivities. Yes, I mean those barbecues and the rest of the "end of
summer" activities. So, let's get to this week's issue so we can all get
the preparations underway!

Until next time...

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CTPCI News Update!

Hello,

Here are some news.

CTPCI :
- we have 9 registered developers for CTPCI. We can hope to get some nice
drivers for some PCI cards.
- the design of schematics is not finished.

CT63 :
- a new small batch may be produced. Those who want to acquire one have to
contact me very quick. I do not accept payments this time because I have to
check with the factory if it is possible to produce a very small quantity
with a correct cost. The final price would be 300 EUR as always (check the
web site for the shipping cost according to your location) with a CPU rev.6
(run at least at 90 MHz).

Thanks

SAP 1.2 Available, ALSA/SDL Variants

* Program forked into two variants (SDL and ALSA)

* Preferences dialog added

* Separate web page created

http://www.baktra.wz.cz/english/mmsap.html

Atari ST/STE Emulator Hatari 0.90 Has Been Released

The version 0.90 of the Atari ST/STE emulator Hatari has been released.
New in this version are:

- Better Spectrum 512 support (60Hz support, improved I/O memory
waitstates).

- STE right border opening support (used in Obsession, Pacemaker).

- Blitter Smudge mode support (used in Pacemaker demo).

- Wheel-mouse simulates cursor up and down.

- Slightly improved FDC handling, --slow-fdc option is not anymore
needed.

- Bugfix to MFP, sound works now in more YMRockerz releases.

- Bugfix to GEMDOS path handling.

- Re-written command-line option handling.

- (Again) lots of code const/static, type usage and indentation cleanup.

- Preliminary support for TOS 3.0x and 030 TT software that runs in ST resolutions and doesn't need PMMU.

- Native GUI for Mac OSX.

- ACSI emulation fixes to get HD formatting to work with AHDI 5. HD emulation now works quite fine with AHDI 5 (but other HD drivers are currently not supported).

- Joystick shortcut changed to toggle cursor emulation between ports 0 and 1.

- Keys for all Hatari shortcuts can now be configured from hatari.cfg.

- Added command line option for setting ST keyboard mapping.

- Joystick command line option requires now parameter for a port for which the joystick cursor emu is enabled.

- Fixed relative mouse event handling in zoomed low-rez.

- Hatari shows now more of the bottom border (screen size is now 384x276 instead of 384x267).

- Fixed sync delay timings - sound should now be better (e.g. on Mac OS X).

- Added basic support for compiling Hatari with MinGW.

URL: http://hatari.sourceforge.net/

                    Paula 2.6 and CKBD 1.5 Sources Released

Hi all,

Programmer Pascal Fellerich has kindly decided to release sources for his applications Paula and CKBD. Paula is a player for MOD-files and the last version to be released was 2.6 but the archive also includes the unfinished 2.7 version. CKBD is a keyboard utility that offers users access to exotic characters by assigning key combos to them. It also allows for key remapping and on top of that also hosts a mouse accelerator.

Sources are available on The Orphaned Projects Page:

http://topp.atari-users.net

Regards,

/Joakim

http://topp.atari-users.net
http://xaaes.atariforge.net
http://www.ataricq.org

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""

             Reminder ACEC Atari Swap Meet September 9, 2006

Well folks, it is getting to that time of year again. The Atari
Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus are holding their annual Atari Swap
meet and Sale. It is going to be on Saturday September the 9th. It will
be at the same time and place as before. For further information please
go to acec.atari.org

Hope to see you there.

Link: http://acec.atari.org/

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                    PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                   compiled by Joe Mirando
                      joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, I finally got the new hard drive
installed, and got all my backed-up data restored and all that stuff.
It's been more work than I'd remembered... which is probably nature's
way of telling me that I've been incredibly lucky with computer
problems.

My niece recently had the hard drive in her laptop give up the ghost and
she, of course, called Uncle Joe to find out what to do.

"Well", I said, "you're going to need to get a new hard drive and get it
installed... I can do that for you".

"Okay", she said, "then what"?

"Then you restore stuff from your backup" came my reply.

"Okay", she said, "how do I do a backup"?

Oy, have you gotten the idea of how the rest of the conversation went? I
got the drive installed for her, and got her OS of choice (XP Home...
yuck) and, against my better judgement, I installed the AOL software
that probably contributed to her problems in the first place. But
waddaya gonna do? The rest is up to her, and I hope she remembers to do
a backup every one in a while.

So, I'm sitting here, wondering what I've forgotten... either on my
system or my niece's. You know how it is... you ALWAYS forget
something, right?

Well, it wasn't until I decided to start writing this column that I
discovered that I hadn't installed my text-editor-of-choice. It's a
simple little app, kind of like STeno was on the ST. Remember STeno?
All I can say is, "Thank you, Eric Rosenquist!"

On another front, now that my wife and I have bought a house, everybody
we know wants us to dog-sit for them!

Now, I'm probably the biggest pet lover around. It just about killed me
to not have a dog when we were living at the apartment, but that was
the landlord's rule, and we stuck to it until an emergency came up and
after my father-in-law passed away the landlord let us keep his dog
with us. It was a nice thing for him to do, and we appreciated it
greatly. Still, Tawnee was my father-in-law's dog, not ours. There's a
difference, and both myself and the dog knew it. In the spring, I'll
probably start looking for a pup or two to populate our new abode.

My wife's niece called last week and asked if we'd 'like' to dog-sit her
11 year old black lab, Lakota while they were in California for 2
weeks.

Believe it or not, I jumped at the chance. I've known Lakota since she
was a pup, and she's a very well-behaved dog. She's welcome here any
time... I probably wouldn't have started the clock at 2 weeks, but what
the heck.

I can tell you right now how it's going to go... Lakota will learn our
routine in about 2 days... and then get us to change it to suit her.
<grin>

That's okay. She's worth it. She'll end up learning a few new things
while she's here too. Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks?
<heh heh>

Well, now that I've got the text editor installed, let's get to the
news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
====================================

Jerome Mathevet asks about upping the RAM in his ST:

"I have an old atari ST at my mom's that I would like to reuse. First of
all, I'd like to fit it 4 megs to make it a bit more usable and also
have some fun with the soldering iron. I downloaded a ZIP archive
containing instructions about how to fit 2 SIPP modules to get a 2.5

meg ST.

However these days, it's difficult to find SIPP modules plus I have a
72-pin SIMM (4 megs) lying around that could take less space inside the
ST casing (and consume less power). My main problem is how do I deal
with the two memory banks? Has anyone tried this before and published
some instructions?

I remember seeing a neat web page regarding DIY hardware mods, which
worked 6 months ago, but seems to have disappeared in the meantime
(I think it was called Vezz's web pages or something)

Also, to facilitate the transfer of files between the ST and my main
machine, I'd have liked to upgrade the floppy to HD, but alas the AJAX
chip must be very hard to come by (or at a ridiculous price). Anyone
has found a way to connect (say) a compact flash card to a ST? That
would be neat and work around the floppy disk issue!"

Djordje Vukovic tells Jerome:

"If you succeed in installing 4MB, you can afford to waste some on
loading TOS 2.06 into RAM. It works perfectly, just needs several
seconds more when booting.

If you happen to have the WD1772 floppy controller chip with 02-02
suffix, it can most probably happily work with HD floppies with a very
simple add-on, see:

http://solair.eunet.yu/~vdjole/atari/hdfloppy.zip"

Jerome replies:

"You can softload the OS ? That sounds VERY nice. How do you proceed?
Also, should I need to return to TOS 1.0 because of a game
incompatibility, it would be trivial to do."

Djordje explains:

"Well, there are several variants, but generally, you need a 'TOS image'
file (can be found on the Net), an optional icons resource file, and a
tos-loader program that goes into AUTO folder, all on the the boot disk
(or floppy disk). There is also a nice patch program to fix some bugs in
the TOS (image) and to customize it somewhat to your liking. When
loaded, TOS 2.06 takes slightly less than 300KB or RAM.

A very convenient detail is that, once loaded, it is reset-proof and
survives most of program crashes. It is even possible to create a
reset-proof 'boot' RAM-disk that will contain your AUTO-folder programs,
accessories, etc. and still be left with a comfortable couple of MB for
work.

You may have some trouble finding a suitable floppy drive though- it
should be able to run as 'drive 0' (contrary to PC requirement) and
should output 'hd-detect' information on pin 2. In these days of
minimum-price bare-bones floppy drives, most of them do not have any
provisions (jumpers) for configuring- if you are lucky you will be able
to divine which of the probably unmarked solder pads should be shorted

to configure the drive-if it is possible at all."

Jerome asks for specifics:

"You don't mention the name of the program but I assume it is
'seltos.prg'? I found it somewhere and the description seems to fit."

Rob Mahlert adds:

"[On the hardware mods thing...] Try the www.archive.org wayback
machine.

http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://atarihacks.cjb.net/

the December 30, 2003 link worked for me."

Jerome tells Rob:

"Errr... I agree the wayback machine can retrieve individual pages but
it's a PITA for browsing a whole web site, since all other links are
redirected to the non-existent web-site. Still, it's better than
nothing, but in this case it's very limited since the info i'm looking
for is located inside archives, which obviously are not stored on
archive.org

I found a text in german (linked from the atari launchpad: great list of
links btw) for connecting a SIMM to a ST, but I can't read it and Google
made me laugh out loud when I had a look at its translation. Very good
if you're feeling depressed but useless as a technical document.

Also, I found a working FTP site for ataris (a rare thing) and found how
to upgrade a ST to tos 2.06. Alas, due to the fact that the atari
techies hadn't planned that future roms would take more than 192 KB,
the upgrade is quite involved and requires lots of extra circuitry that
I think won't fit into the casing easily. I'll leave that to others...

Anyone up for translating the german text for real, though ? (2500
bytes)"

Last week, someone asked about repairing a hard drive boot sector. It
was still a bit too painful for me last week, owing to the fact that my
hard drive had just given up the ghost. But I'm over it now, and ready
to cope. <G>

"How can I repair a boot sector on my HD? I have Diamond Edge and
HDdriver 8 utils but can't fathom a way of putting things right. Any
help would be appreciated."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, answers:

"As far as HDDRUTIL is concerned it can repair a root sector (this is
explained in the manual), but not a boot sector."

Roger Burrows of Anodyne Software tells the poster:

"Of course you need a good backup of the boot (on some external medium such as a floppy), then you should be able to restore. For further help, you could try emailing the current author of Diamond Edge (me). Check my web site (www.anodynesoftware.com) for email addresses."

Derryck Croker asks:

"Wouldn't just re-installing the driver work?"

Uwe tells Derryck:

"No, it wouldn't. If a boot sector is corrupted the corresponding partition cannot be accessed anymore. Re-installing the hard driver does not change anything. (If the boot partition is affected you cannot even re-install the driver since the partition is missing.)

The actual boot sector data have to be restored by special tools, like DISKUS (http://www.seimet.de/diskus_english.html, German version only)."

Well folks, I know it's short, but that's all there is for this week. Tune in again next week when Lakota and I will be back to discuss more STuff. 'Till then, keep your ears open so that you'll hear what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Video Games Ban Blocked!
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Burnout Goes For 5th Lap!
                                     Atari Has 'The Witcher'!
                                     And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

                 Violent Video Games Ban In Louisiana Blocked

A state law that would ban sales of violent video games to minors violates free speech rights and cannot be enforced, a judge ruled.

U.S. District Judge James Brady said the state had no right to bar

distribution of materials simply because they show violent behavior. Brady issued an injunction, calling the law an "invasion of First Amendment rights" of producers, retailers and the minors who play the games.

"Depictions of violence are entitled to full constitutional protection," Brady wrote Thursday.

Louisiana is the latest in a string of states, including Minnesota, Illinois, California and Michigan, to have had similar bans blocked in the courts. A federal judge in Illinois this month ordered the state to pay more than $510,000 to three business groups - including the Entertainment Software Association, a plaintiff in the Louisiana case - for legal fees incurred in fighting a similar state law.

The association's president criticized Gov. Kathleen Blanco and state lawmakers for approving the law while struggling to recover from Hurricane Katrina.

"In the post-Katrina era, voters should be outraged that the Legislature and governor wasted their tax dollars on this ill-fated attack on video games," Douglas Lowenstein said in a statement.

Gov. Kathleen Blanco said in a statement late Friday she believes violent video games harm children.

"I'm calling on all parents to diligently monitor the video games that their children are allowed to play. If the courts can not protect our children, then we need to do it by rejecting the merchant of violence," the statement said.

The bill's sponsor, Democratic Rep. Roy Burrell, did not return a phone call.

Brady deflected the arguments by the state that video games should be treated differently from other forms of media because their interactive format can encourage violence.

"This argument has been rejected many times," Brady wrote, noting that other judges have ruled that movies and television also have interactive elements.

Brady also rejected the state's argument that video games depicting extreme violence can be "psychologically harmful" to minors.

"The state may not restrict video game expression merely because it dislikes the way that expression shapes an individual's thoughts and attitudes," he wrote.

Attorney General Charles Foti had not decided whether to appeal the ruling, a spokeswoman said.

The law sought to ban the sales of video games to minors if an "average person" would conclude that they appeal to a "morbid interest in violence." Sellers would face fines of up to $2,000, a year in prison or both for selling offending games.

The law also sought to ban sale of games to minors if the average person would conclude they depict violence that is "patently offensive" to an adult, and the games lack artistic, political or scientific value.

Burnout Goes For A Fifth Lap

Electronic Arts confirms development of next edition of wreck-happy racer
is under way for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360.

Electronic Arts isn't letting up on the gas of one of its premier racing
franchises. The publisher today confirmed that Burnout 5 is currently in
development and will be released on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 sometime
in 2007.

The decision to make a new version of the franchise was a no-brainer for
the company; since EA took over the Burnout license from Acclaim, it has
been one of the highest-rated racing series on the market.

Given Burnout's past success, developer Criterion isn't straying too far
from the core of the winning formula. Gamers will once again buckle up and
speed through the streets of Paradise City, with little concern to how
their reckless driving will affect their insurance premiums.

However, Criterion is taking a U-turn on the series' user interface.
Burnout 5 will apparently take an open-world approach, with menus
eliminated and "every inch of the world" an opportunity to create massive
fender benders. As if inspired by the legendary Enzo Ferrari/Gizmondo exec
escapade, cars in Burnout 5 will also be able to be torn in half.

Burnout 5 has not yet been rated or priced.

'Star Fox' For Adults, Children

The video-game company famous for Mario the plumber is turning to one of
its lesser-known characters in a new title for the Nintendo DS handheld.

With "Star Fox Command," (rated E10+, $34.99) Nintendo reintroduces
spaceship captain Fox McCloud and his supporting cast of interstellar
animals in a series of mini-battles against aliens called Anglars.

For those of you who a) never played the original Super NES game back in
the early 1990s or b) have never heard of Fox McCloud, yes, he's a fox. He
and his buddy Slippy Toad and some other anthropomorphized pals happen to
be ace fighter pilots.

Having all the cutesy critters doesn't mean it's for kids only: there's
actually a surprising amount of character conflict that may resonate more
with adults (if you can get past all the cutesy critters).

And though the single-player story mode felt way too short, there are many
different ways to end the saga, depending on the choices you make along
the way.

The game's core elements are split between 3-D dogfights - a Star Fox
staple - and a new turn-based system that brings a strategic element to
the action.

The developers have effectively incorporated the DS' unique design. The

game's interface and controls are simple and effective, and piloting the various Airwings by tapping and dragging on the lower touch screen was more precise than I thought it would be.

I had mixed feelings on the turn-based aspect. It was neat being able to move my forces across a battlefield, but correctly moving my hyper-intelligent spacefaring animals to the right location felt more like guesswork than strategy.

You have a limited number of turns, and it's easy to run out of chances and lose the game with so much trial-and-error ambiguity. At least you'll be able to breeze through this aspect once you figure it out and get back into the action.

"Star Fox Command" also slightly misses the target with its ability to record your own voice, which the characters will then speak back in a strange sort of gibberish. It sounds so garbled, though, that it's hard to tell whose voice it is.

The single-player mode is pretty easy and won't take experienced gamers more than a day to neatly wrap up, leaving multiplayer as the only thing to give this game some staying power.

There are two such modes: one that lets up to six combatants blast each other from the skies over the DS' local-area network, and another where gamers can connect to Nintendo's free Wi-Fi service to fight up to three others via the Internet.

Two and a half stars out of four.

EA's Critically Acclaimed Boxing Game Enters the
PlayStation 3 Ring This Holiday Season with EA
Sports Fight Night Round 3

Electronic Arts announced Wednesday that EA Sports Fight Night Round 3 will be released for the PlayStation3. Garnering high marks from gaming critics including receiving the first perfect score in Official Xbox Magazine for the Xbox 360 version, EA Sports Fight Night Round 3 will launch this holiday in North America and in Europe with exclusive gameplay features for the PlayStation 3.

"Gamers loved the realism of EA Sports Fight Night Round 3 when it was released on Xbox 360 because of its incredible next-gen graphics and gameplay," said Michael Blank, producer, EA Canada. "With EA Sports Fight Night Round 3 for PlayStation 3, we want to give gamers an exciting and unique gameplay experience that will take the realism of Fight Night even further by allowing players to live the game through their own eyes. This is the closest you'll get to trading blows with Muhammad Ali."

Aside from bringing the intensity and signature gameplay that the EA Sports Fight Night franchise is known for to PlayStation 3 gamers worldwide, the PlayStation 3 version will showcase a unique gameplay feature set including an exclusive new mode called Get in the Ring that continues to cement this title as the king of the virtual ring.

In addition, EA Sports Fight Night Round 3 for PlayStation 3 will offer a comprehensive ESPN Integration package that delivers updates, scores,

breaking news, radio podcasts and ESPN Motion.

EA Sports Fight Night Round 3 for the PlayStation 3 is developed by EA Canada. The game's official website is www.fightnightround3.com.

'Dirge of Cerberus' Defies Expectations, For Better and Worse

Final Fantasy VII is widely credited as the role-playing game that brought console RPGs to the masses. It was a resounding success, selling over 9 million copies worldwide when it released back in 1997, and fans have been clamoring for a sequel ever since. So it's no surprise fans let out a collective "Huh?" when Square Enix announced the first game sequel to Final Fantasy VII would be a first-person shooter.

Dirge of Cerberus stars Vincent Valentine, a hidden character in Final Fantasy VII. He may be unknown even to those that played the original. But fret not, because the moody, vampiric Vincent turns out to be great source material.

The story fills in the holes of Vincent's past - an ill-fated love affair with the scientist Lucrece and his trauma as a test subject for Hojo, the mad scientist of Final Fantasy VII. It's an engaging plot, but doesn't feel like it meshes entirely with the original story.

Dirge of Cerberus can be played either with a PS2 controller or with a USB mouse and keyboard. Unless you're a master of console FPS games, you may find the PS2 controls awkward and unwieldy. You'll need to strafe (left analog stick), aim (right analog stick) and fire (R1) all at the same time. It may feel a bit like trying to rub your belly and pat your head at the same time. If that's the case, go for the keyboard and mouse instead. Once you do, Dirge's setup will feel identical to a PC FPS, and anyone who's done some PC shooting will feel right at home.

The game has some RPG elements: you can upgrade your guns, add magic, and even buy and sell items. But overall, you'll be relying on your trigger finger more than any superfluous upgrades. The game lets you customize three different guns, in short-, medium-, or long-range flavors. To make quick progress, you'll need to figure out which gun is best for each situation.

The enemies are an assortment of soldiers and nasty beasts that sometimes attack from all sides. This is one reason using a mouse makes it easier to maneuver. There are a number of boss battles, too, and these are trickier than your normal encounters. You'll have to look for unconventional ways, like shooting explosive barrels, to cause damage to bosses.

Dirge oozes high production values - no surprise from a company that has built its reputation on the Final Fantasy name.

The character models look impressive. The fluid body movements and believable facial expressions show that Square has learned quite a bit about animation during this console generation. The character models are on par with the Metal Gear Solid series, which makes them among the best looking on the PS2.

The environments, however, could use some polish. Most of the areas use similar textures over and over. There aren't many interactive elements in

the field, which makes places feel lifeless and empty. Buildings and rooms feel boxy. It would be nice to have more variety than four walls and a roof.

The CG movies are superb - no surprise since they were done by the same team that did this year's jaw-dropping Final Fantasy VII movie sequel, Advent Children.

Dirge isn't a difficult game on "Normal" mode. You won't run out of bullets and there are plenty of power-ups lying around. This could be a blessing, since it's aimed at RPG fans that might not play FPS games. On the other hand, if you already have your FPS degree, head straight for "Hard" mode.

RPGs are what Square Enix does best, and while Dirge is an admirable effort to try something new, it doesn't hold up to the big names in the FPS genre. It's by no means a bad game, but that doesn't help shake the feeling that this is the Episode I afterthought of the Final Fantasy series. Square occassionally makes a strange combination work (Kingdom Hearts, anyone?), but Dirge of Cerberus isn't up to that level.

Atari To Distribute The Witcher

Atari has confirmed that it has signed the European and Asian distribution rights for CD Projekt's fantasy RPG, The Witcher. The game, which is due for release during Spring 2007 on PC, sees player follow the story of master monster slayer Geralt, in a world where the definitions of good and evil are blurred.

"The talented and passionate development team at CD Projekt has invested an enormous amount of time and love into The Witcher, resulting in a tremendous game that blends stunning graphics and engaging combat with an extraordinary traditional role-playing experience," said Cyril Voiron, Marketing Director, Atari Europe. "We are excited to reinforce our commitment to delivering the best role-playing games in the world by bringing this highly impressive title to gamers in Europe and Asia and we're working towards The Witcher becoming the RPG of 2007."

"We are delighted to begin a long and mutually beneficial relationship with Atari, a publishing partner that shares our commitment to delivering a top-quality role-playing game," said Michal Kicinski, Joint CEO of CD Projekt. "We are very much looking forward to working with Atari to bring this distinctive fantasy world that we love to a broad audience."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

AOL 9.0 Accused of Behaving Like Badware

AOL's free Internet client software has earned the company a slap on the wrist from StopBadware.org, a consortium set up to combat malicious software. In a report set to be released today, the group advises users to steer clear of the software because of its "badware behavior."

The report blasts the free version of AOL 9.0 because it "interferes with computer use," and because of the way it meddles with components such as the Internet Explorer browser and the Windows taskbar. The suite is also criticized for engaging in "deceptive installation" and faulted because some components fail to uninstall.

The main problem is that AOL simply doesn't properly inform users of what its software will do to their PCs, said John Palfrey, StopBadware.org's co-director. "We don't think that the disclosure is adequate and there are certain mistakes in the way the software is architected in terms of leaving some programs behind," he said. "When there are large programs, some of which stay around after you've thought you've uninstalled them, they need to be disclosed to the user."

Because AOL has taken steps to address StopBadware.org's concerns, the group has held off on officially rating AOL 9.0 as badware, Palfrey said.

Still, the report is not good news for AOL. Other software that has been the target of StopBadware.org reports includes Kazaa, the Jessica Simpson Screensaver, and the Starware News Toolbar.

Backed by tech companies such as Google, Lenovo Group, and Sun Microsystems, StopBadware.org bills itself as a "Neighborhood Watch" of the Internet. It is run out of two well-respected university departments: Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet & Society in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and University of Oxford's Internet Institute in the U.K.

Today's report states that AOL is taking steps to address StopBadware.org's concerns, and that the company has confirmed that there is a design flaw in its uninstaller software, according to a draft obtained by IDG News.

AOL has been struggling through some major changes of late.

It has opened up its once-private network, offering the AOL 9.0 software for free in a bid to attract new users and boost online advertising as its traditional subscribers have fled. The company now has 17.7 million U.S. subscribers, a drop of 3.1 million over the past year.

Last week, three AOL executives, including Chief Technology Officer Maureen Govern left the company in the wake of a scandal over AOL's public disclosure of more than 2 million search queries made by 650,000 AOL users.

AOL has also come under fire for licensing its free antivirus software, called Active Virus Shield, with what anti-adware advocates view as excessive advertising and data gathering provisions.

Since the search disclosure, AOL has taken steps to restore consumer trust, said Chief Executive Officer Jon Miller in a recent e-mail to employees. "There is a tremendous responsibility that goes along with our mission of serving consumers online," he wrote. "We have to earn their trust each and every day and with each and every action we take."

StopBadware.org's reports can be found online.

Times Blocks Article To U.K. Web Readers

The New York Times' Web site is blocking British readers from a news article detailing the investigation into the recent airline terror plot, turning its Internet ad-targeting technology into a means of complying with U.K. laws.

"We had clear legal advice that publication in the U.K. might run afoul of their law," Times spokeswoman Diane McNulty said Tuesday. "It's a country that doesn't have the First Amendment, but it does have the free press. We felt we should respect their country's law."

Visitors who click on a link to the article, published Monday, instead got a notice explaining that British law "prohibits publication of prejudicial information about the defendants prior to trial." The blocked article reveals evidence authorities have in the alleged plot to use liquid explosives to down U.S. airliners over the Atlantic.

The Times site already targets ads based on a visitor's location, but McNulty said this was the first time the technology was used in an editorial capacity. The Times also blocked U.K. access to an audio summary of the top Times stories, which included the article in question.

Other news organizations have blocked content before, mostly for financial reasons, said Michael Geist, a law professor at the University of Ottawa.

For example, the British Broadcasting Corp. has been testing online access to landmark television reports of major world events from the past half-century. But it said it cannot make the video available for free outside of Britain because it is funded through an annual levy on British TV owners.

The BBC and other organizations also have blocked audio and video of Olympics competition because they bought licenses only for specific geographic regions. Likewise, to protect broadcast contracts, Major League Baseball has used similar technology to prevent live online access to games involving hometown teams.

The underlying blocking technology, known as geotargeting or geolocation, checks the numeric Internet address of a visitor's computer against databases showing the company or service provider to which that address was assigned.

The technique is not foolproof.

A British computer modem could, for instance, make an international call to make the visitor appear to be coming from, say, the United States.

And British readers could find excerpts posted on Web journals and other unblocked sites. In fact, the Daily Mail of London published an article on the case, attributing details to the Times.

"No doubt an intrepid computer user will probably be able to access the article," Geist said. But "I suspect the majority simply won't bother."

Jonathan Zittrain, a law professor affiliated with Harvard and Oxford universities, said he doubts whether U.K. officials would crack down.

"They all basically want to say they made some effort," he said. The Times "can say the laws are respected. The British can say the laws are respected. And everyone can read the story."

McNulty said the technology may not be 100 percent reliable, but "we've done everything that we could."

The Times also is keeping the article out of printed editions published in the U.K. or mailed to U.K. subscribers. And it is stripping the item from a news service for ships and hotels printed by a company in Liverpool.

McNulty said the last time the newspaper blocked a specific article was about 15 years ago. The newspaper feared that Canadian authorities would confiscate an edition that reported on a sex abuse trial, she said, so the item was kept out of the early editions that got sent to Canada.

It's not clear whether the Times' decision would make it more likely for news organizations to engage in country-specific self-censorship in the future, particularly in areas involving libel, where protections aren't as strong outside the United States.

After all, courts already have applied country-specific laws to the borderless Internet.

An Australia court in 2002 allowed a defamation case against Dow Jones & Co. to be heard in that country because people there could have read the article in question online. The case was ultimately settled.

Earlier, a French judge had ordered Yahoo Inc. to prevent French users from encountering Nazi paraphernalia banned in France on the Yahoo auction site meant for U.S. visitors.

"Courts will start to take note of the availability of those technologies," Geist said. "Now that it's increasingly proven technology with a base level of effectiveness, I expect we'll see that consideration."

India State To Dump Windows for Linux

A southern Indian state plans to switch all school computers from Microsoft Windows to the free Linux operating system, an official said Thursday.

The changeover on computers used in some 12,500 high schools in the state of Kerala is set for Friday, and teachers are being trained on the new software, said the state's education minister, M.A. Baby.

The state is ruled by communist politicians and its top elected official, Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan, has long been a supporter of free software, railing against the dominance of Microsoft's Windows when he was a state legislator.

However, Baby insisted that the state government has no grudge against Microsoft specifically.

But Achuthanandan was keen to develop the state as a "free and open software systems destination," Baby told The Associated Press.

"It is our stated policy that only free software should be used for IT education in Kerala's schools. The government is introducing Linux based software as tools to teach various subjects," Baby told the Associated Press on Thursday.

The decision to switch to Linux came after free software guru Richard Stallman, founder of the open-source GNU software project, visited Kerala two weeks ago, and persuaded officials to discard proprietary software, such as Microsoft, at state-run schools, Baby said.

Despite the denials that Microsoft was the target, opposition leader M.A. Shahnawaz, of the Congress party, said he believed the decision was based on the communists' opposition to the software giant's products.

He cited the communists' opposition to a Microsoft-supported computer training program that the Congress party enacted in 2002 when it ruled the state.

"I think schools should be given the option to choose whether teachers are to be trained in Linux systems or Microsoft," Shahnawaz said.

IT Pros Say They Can't Stop Data Breaches

In the wake of widely publicized security compromises at AOL and AT&T, a study released Aug. 28 by the Elk Rapids, Mich.-based privacy management research company Ponemon Institute finds that only 37 percent of IT professionals believe their company is effective at detecting data breaches.

Citing a lack of resources and high product costs as barriers to preventing data leakage, respondents were uncertain about their company's ability to discover breaches of confidential information. Only 43 percent believed that their company would detect a large breach (involving more than 10,000 customer records) more than 80 percent of the time. 17 percent of respondents felt their company would correctly detect a small data breach (involving less than 100 customer records) more than 80 percent of the time.

Respondents viewed the loss or theft of customer or consumer data as the second most detrimental data breach, even if privacy laws required notification, diminishing brand, reputation and customer confidence, and making the incident a public event. The loss or theft of intellectual property came in first in terms of risk, reputations and cost to the organization.

Though 66 percent of respondents reported the use of technologies to help their organizations manage the leakage of sensitive or confidential information, cost was the primary reason cited why organizations would not use these technologies. Thirty-five percent felt that they were too expensive, 16 percent felt manual procedures were adequate, 16 percent felt that their organizations were not vulnerable to breaches and 12 percent criticized existing technology-based data for having too high of a false positive rate.

Many respondents believed that their organizations did not have the right leadership structure or enough resources to properly enforce compliance. Forty-one percent believed that their organization was not effective at

enforcing compliance with their organization's data protection policies and procedures.

Man Gets Three Years for 'Botnet' Attack

A man was sentenced to three years in prison Friday for launching a computer attack that hit tens of thousands of computers, including some belonging to the Department of Defense, a Seattle hospital and a California school district.

Christopher Maxwell, 21, of Vacaville, Calif., was also sentenced to three years of supervised release. He pleaded guilty in May to federal charges of conspiracy to intentionally cause damage to a protected computer and conspiracy to commit computer fraud.

U.S. District Judge Marsha J. Pechman said the crime showed "incredible self-centeredness" with little regard for the impact on others. She said the prison time was needed as "deterrence for all those youth out there who are squirreled away in their basements hacking."

Defense attorney Steve Bauer had sought probation and community service, noting his client had no prior criminal record and saying Maxwell did not intend his robot virus program to spread as far as it did.

Maxwell and two juvenile co-conspirators were accused of using "botnet" attacks - programs that let hackers infect and control a computer network - to install unwanted Internet advertising software, a job that earned them about $100,000.

Three victims testified at Maxwell's sentencing: a representative of Seattle's Northwest Hospital, damaged in February 2005; a representative of the U.S. Defense Department, which reported damage to hundreds of computers worldwide in 2004 and 2005; and a former system administrator for the Colton Unified School District in California, where more than 1,000 computers were damaged over several months in 2005.

ISP Releases Name In File-Sharing Case

The entertainment industry achieved a key victory Thursday after a Dutch Internet service provider surrendered the name and address of one of its customers suspected of illegal file-sharing.

Ronald van der Aart of UPC, the Netherlands' second-largest broadband ISP with 500,000 subscribers, said the company decided not to appeal a summary judgment by Amsterdam's District Court in a suit brought by the Brain Institute, an organization founded to fight digital copyright infringement.

Brain spokesman Okke Delfos-Visser said the agency would now contact the UPC customer and would likely sue if a settlement isn't reached first. Similar cases in the United States are usually settled for several thousand dollars.

Brain is funded by the U.S.-based Motion Picture Association and Recording Industry Association of America, along with their international and Dutch

counterparts.

Previous attempts by Brain to force Dutch Internet providers to give up
names of clients suspected of illegal file-sharing had foundered on
technicalities. Brain and the organizations it represents say have often
been powerless to sue for copyright infringement because they only have
numeric Internet Protocol addresses assigned by companies like UPC, not the
actual identities.

UPC argued it cannot be certain which of its clients used a given IP
address at any given moment.

But in the current case, Brain had gotten a court order to seize the
servers of a now-defunct file-sharing network called "Dikke Donder," which
used BitTorrent file-sharing software.

Stored on the Dikke Donder servers were records of the IP and e-mail
addresses that network members had used to sign up for the group. Several
addresses were issued by UPC, including one to a user called "muzan."

The Amsterdam District Court ruled that, taken together, the e-mail and IP
addresses must have been enough for UPC to know the identity of the Dikke
Donder user. Any objections, it said, were "so theoretical that there can't
be any discussion of a 'reasonable doubt.'"

E-mail attempts to reach the client, using an address identified in court
documents, bounced. UPC did not disclose the person's identity to The
Associated Press.

New Web Browser Won't Leave User Footprints

The latest entrant to the crowded Internet browser market is the
appropriately named Browzar, a tool specifically designed to protect users'
privacy by not retaining details of the Web sites they've searched.

Most Web browsers - like Microsoft's Internet Explorer - automatically save
users' searches in Internet caches and histories. Users do have the option
of deleting the history folder and emptying the Internet cache, but many
people either don't know how to do that or tend not to, leaving a trail of
where they've been online behind them in the browser.

Browzar is being officially launched today but can already be run or
downloaded from its Web site. Users don't have to register to use the free
browser.

Browzar automatically deletes Internet caches, histories, cookies, and
auto-complete forms. Auto-complete is the feature that anticipates the
search term or Web address a user might enter by relying on information
previously entered into the browser.

Browzar is the brainchild of Ajaz Ahmed, the man behind Freeserve, the
first U.K. Internet service provider to offer free Internet access to
customers in the late 1990s. He sold Freeserve - which quickly became the
U.K.'s largest ISP - to France Telecom's Wanadoo operation in 2001 for $3
billion.

"Privacy is becoming a bigger issue," Ahmed said, pointing to the recent

leak of more than 20 million user search queries by AOL. "The AOL story highlights the issue that some of the things people are searching for are very, very personal."

The Browzar site contains a page of stories from users who have either discovered things they rather not have known about their friends and loved ones through their Web browser's history or auto-complete feature or who have had information revealed they would have preferred kept private. For example, Ahmed cited a statistic that 35 percent of people using matchmaking Web sites are already married.

While Freeserve was focused on the needs of the U.K. market, Ahmed hopes Browzar will have global appeal, particularly anywhere users are going online on shared computers, for instance, at Internet cafes.

Browzar is very small in size, 264KB, and downloads within a few seconds. The browser is currently available for Windows and Ahmed plans versions for the Mac OS and Linux. Browzar is in beta testing at present and should enter general availability some time next month, he said.

Ahmed has formed a private company, Browzar, based in Huddersfield in the U.K. which he is fully funding, to help support and market the new browser. He's also hoping interest in Browzar will be driven by word of mouth and the Internet to achieve the kind of ubiquity enjoyed by the likes of Skype, MySpace, and YouTube.

So far, Browzar the company has a handful of employees, but Ahmed is planning to release more sophisticated versions of the Web browser as well as server-side applications. He plans to take on more staff as the company's product portfolio grows.

Browzar doesn't limit law enforcement's ability to track an individual's online behavior. "We don't make people invisible on the Internet; it's a privacy tool for your own desktop PC or the PC you're using," Ahmed said. "Law enforcement can still go to ISPs if they want; we don't override anything."

Browzar includes a search engine and the startup will generate money through revenue-sharing deals with search engine providers. Initially, the relationship is with Yahoo's Overture advertising sales subsidiary, but Ahmed plans to set up additional partnerships with other search companies over time to give users a choice of search engines.

Ahmed came up with the name "Browzar" as one that was simple to both say and remember. He said he was surprised that the domains browzar.com, browzar.net, and browzar.co.uk were still available.

Google Unveils Office Rival

With Microsoft Office clearly in its long-range sights, Google Monday launched a package of Web-based productivity apps.

The offering, called Google Apps for Your Domain, comprises Google services that all have seen the light of day: Gmail, Google Talk, Google Calendar, and Google Page Creator.

Notably absent from the menu are Writely and Google Spreadsheets, which

respectively provide basic word-processing and spreadsheet functions that would be essential for a productivity suite, a la the more feature-rich Microsoft Word and Excel. Also, Google has yet to unveil an application that could rival Microsoft PowerPoint.

With Google Apps for Your Domain, organizations can tailor the included applications' UIs with their own branding, and they can pick and choose which services to use. Moreover, there's a Web-based management interface through which admins can manage their user account list, set up aliases and distribution lists, and enable the services they want for their domain. End-users will be able to access their apps from any Web-connected computer.

For the time being, there's one package available: the Standard Edition. Still in beta and free to use, it offers 2GB of e-mail storage per user as well as customer service for admins via e-mail or an online help center. According to Google's announcement, organizations that sign up during the beta period will not ever have to pay for users accepted during that period (provided Google continues to offer the service).

The Standard Edition may meet the needs of mom-and-pop Web sites and other such small organizations, but not larger companies. However, Google says that a premium version of the package is under development "for organizations with more advanced needs. More information, including details on pricing, will be available soon."

Google acknowledges in its announcement that it will eventually reach out for the enterprise, as well as ISPs and universities.

The company's arguments for the benefit of using hosted applications in lieu of an installed software base aren't really new ones: Going with a hosted app can save you money and reduce the amount of time your IT staff has to spend on maintenance.

"A hosted service like Google Apps for Your Domain eliminates many of the expenses and hassles of maintaining a communications infrastructure, which is welcome relief for many small business owners and IT staffers. Organizations can let Google be the experts in delivering high quality e-mail, messaging, and other Web-based services while they focus on the needs of their users and their day-to-day business," said Dave Girouard, vice president and general manager, enterprise, at Google.

Arguably, the same potential drawbacks to relying on hosted versions of business-critical applications apply: You're at the mercy of the company to stay in business, to remain committed to supporting the product, and to maintain uptime.

Microsoft Leaks Vista Pricing

A slew of Internet buzz was started when the price for Microsoft's upcoming Windows Vista was accidentally leaked on the company's Canadian Web site. Even though the information was immediately taken down from the site, word spread quickly on the Internet that the Home Basic edition of Vista will be $233, the same price as Windows XP Home.

The Home Premium version comes in slightly higher, because it includes support for Media Center. According to the site, Windows Vista Business

will be priced at about $341.

The pricing information comes during the same week that Microsoft is expected to put out Release Candidate 1 (RC1), the final testing phase of the system, and an indication that Vista is close to a final version.

Public release of the RC1 could come as early as the first week of September, although Microsoft has scheduled to release it later in the month.

Both the RC1 release and the price data could be a sign that Vista is on schedule, analysts note.

In the past, the operating system's schedule has slipped several times as developers worked on bugs. Most notably, hardware manufacturers complained when Microsoft noted that Vista would not meet its December deadline, which could negatively affect new PC sales.

Schedule uncertainty for Vista was also heightened recently when the system's beta 2 - the last step before RC1 - caused widespread grumbling among testers.

Released publicly in June, the beta version is allegedly plagued by bugs and memory consumption issues, some testers have reported.

But even if RC1 displays similar problems, that does not mean Vista will be starting from a weak position when it is released in its initial versions, noted Samir Bhavnani, Current Analysis director of research.

"Microsoft is attempting to meet a formidable goal, which is to create an easy-to-operate, secure OS," he said. "But keep in mind that Windows is on most of the world's computers, and that means they have to service an extremely large audience of both business and consumer users."

Because of its need to develop an OS for such a broad base of customers, Microsoft takes much longer to make system tweaks, Bhavnani said, and naturally a complete OS overhaul will take time to perfect.

The recent bugs and issues are standard for such a process, and the pricing leak from Microsoft Canada shows that the company is likely close to getting Vista out the door.

"Vista is a huge project, but also a huge improvement," said Bhavnani. "It will give users a very different experience than what they have today."

Microsoft Windows Vista Goes On Sale at Amazon

Internet retailer Amazon.com Inc. has started taking early orders for Microsoft Corp.'s long-delayed Windows Vista operating system, offering versions of the product from $100 to $399.

The retailer's Web site said the software will be available on January 30, and an Amazon spokesman said on Tuesday the date was an estimate based on informal conversations with Microsoft and others in the computer industry.

Microsoft spokesman Lou Gellos declined to comment on Amazon's pre-sale, saying the software maker is still finalizing its pricing model. It has not

set a release date for the new version of Windows, which sits on more than 90 percent of the world's personal computers.

Microsoft has repeatedly postponed the release of Windows Vista, which is already five years in the making. Quality assurance delays have put off the consumer version of Vista until early 2007 - after the crucial holiday shopping season. Vista is due to ship to corporate customers in November.

Goldman Sachs analyst Rick Sherlund said in a note to clients that Amazon's pricing on high-end versions of the software was above his forecasts.

Vista will be sold in more versions than Microsoft's current Windows XP operating system, with different lines targeted at consumers and businesses.

Amazon's pricing ranges from $100 for a basic upgrade version of Windows to $399 for a full "ultimate" version of the operating system, according to the retailer's Web site.

"The pricing of higher-end versions, which we believe will be more popular than the lower-end versions, may be more significant and longer lasting than the incremental upgrade revenues that have been of greatest focus by analysts," Sherlund said in his note.

Sherlund also said that a January 30 release date would be about two months ahead of what he was expecting.

Google Offers Book Downloads

Google has expanded its controversial book search service to allow people to download whole copies of books in PDF format to their computers, with the ability to print them out.

The feature will go live Wednesday at the service's Web site, said Adam Smith, group product manager of Google Book Search and Google Scholar.

The books available for download will only be those that are in the public domain and thus not protected by copyright, Smith said. Until now, people have been able to read these public-domain books on the Google Book Search Web site, but not download and print them, he said.

Google will not allow downloading of copyrighted books, not even those for which it has obtained permission from the copyright holders to display their full text, Smith said.

The vast majority of the public-domain books available for download have been scanned as part of the library project of the Google Book Search service, Smith said.

For the project, Google is scanning portions of the collections of some of the world's largest academic libraries, including Google partners Harvard University, Stanford University and Oxford University.

However, critics say Google can't scan copyrighted books it obtains from the libraries unless it gets permission from the copyright holders. The issue is at the center of two separate lawsuits brought against Google last year, one by The Authors Guild and three authors, and another one by The

Association of American Publishers on behalf of five of its members: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Pearson Education, Penguin Group USA, Simon & Schuster, and John Wiley & Sons.

Verizon Drops DSL Fee After US FCC Pressure

Verizon Communications Inc. said on Wednesday it had dropped a surcharge for high-speed Internet service after U.S. regulators questioned whether the No. 2 U.S. telephone carrier was following truthful billing practices.

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission sent Verizon a letter last week questioning a new fee on digital subscriber line (DSL) services which the company introduced in place of a fee the federal government ended earlier this month.

Verizon's decision follows a similar move last week by BellSouth Corp., which scrapped plans for a surcharge after pressure from regulators.

The phone companies are no longer required to contribute revenue from their high-speed Internet service to the government's Universal Service Fund, which helps fund communications services for lower-income and rural users.

The companies typically passed that cost on to customers.

Instead of cutting customers' bills to reflect the end of monthly contributions of $1.25 or $2.85, depending on connection speeds, Verizon had introduced a new fee of $1.20 or $2.70 to help pay for building its networks.

Consumer protection groups had protested, saying users were paying enough premiums and the companies were essentially trying to raise prices without subscribers noticing.

The FCC had said it was investigating whether Verizon's practices were in line with its "Truth-in-Billing" rules.

"We have listened to our customers... and are eliminating this charge in response to their concerns," Verizon's chief marketing officer Bob Ingalls said in a statement on Wednesday.

A small number of customers who have already been billed for the surcharge will receive a credit, the company said.

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin said in a statement on Wednesday that he was happy with the decisions by Verizon and BellSouth.

Employers Crack Down on Personal Net Use

Tasha Newitt was aware her employer, the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, had a policy restricting personal use of work computers, but she believed it focused on Web surfing, not e-mail. Nonetheless, she was careful to use her work e-mail primarily for professional matters. So she was stunned when the agency fired her after finding 418 personal e-mail messages received over a period of five months

(or about 5 per workday) on her PC.

Newitt isn't alone: Increasingly, managers are cracking down on employee Internet activity by drafting strict usage policies - and enforcing them through use of software that monitors surfing, examines e-mail, and restricts the sites an employee can browse to.

Newitt, an eight-year agency veteran, says that she received great performance reviews as well as certificates for providing outstanding customer service in her position as a workers' compensation claims manager. Most of the personal e-mail messages were innocuous notes regarding birthday greetings and lunch plans with coworkers, she says. But none of this mattered to Newitt's employer examined her office's e-mail after a co-worker filed a sexual-harassment complaint against a supervisor. The department ultimately fired 8 employees (including Newitt) and disciplined 16 others for their improper use of agency equipment.

Will Vehrs, who works at the Virginia Department of Business Assistance, received a ten-day unpaid suspension for excessive casual use of the Internet while at work. Vehrs' employer knew he blogged, often about state issues, at the Commonwealth Conservative's Virginia politics blog. In fact, Virginia's governor read and sometimes reused his posts; but he was punished after composing humorous captions for photographs as part of a local newspaper's contest. His captions poked fun at a Virginia county and annoyed a local politician.

Whether streaming video is eating into a company's network bandwidth or employees' viewing of adult content is exposing the firm to sexual harassment charges, companies have some legitimate reasons to limit their workers' access to and activity on the Internet.

A 2005 survey of 526 businesses and organizations by the ePolicy Institute and the American Management Association found that 76 percent of them monitor the sites that their employees visit, and 65 percent block certain sites. At least 55 percent of them review and retain employees' e-mail, and 36 percent track the content on workers' PCs, their keystrokes, and the time that they spend at the keyboard. Lost productivity is a major concern: Last spring, some companies blocked streaming video during the NCAA men's college basketball tournament. Even so, more than 14 million fans accessed video from the NCAA March Madness on Demand Web site during the first three rounds of the tournament, according to CBS SportsLine; and considering the starting times of the games, many of them likely did so from work.

Massachusetts-based Networks Unlimited audits the Internet activity of its clients' employees and sells equipment for auditing and blocking workers' Internet use. It says that many executives are surprised at what their employees do online. The company installs a monitoring box on its customers' networks for a week and then extrapolates longer-term patterns of usage from that data to estimate how many hours a year employees spend browsing Web sites.

For example, Networks Unlimited found that fewer than 100 employees at Balls Food - a supermarket and pharmacy chain based in Kansas City - had Net access at work, but that they spent a total of 686 hours in one year using Web-based e-mail such as Hotmail and Yahoo. By contrast, 120 employees at a New York-based software company spent an estimated 7700 hours in one year accessing Web-based e-mail, 2400 hours at shopping and sports-related sites, and 250 hours visiting pornographic sites. In total, the employees spent more than 17,000 hours in one year on recreational surfing (roughly 3 hours per employee per week), which translates into an

estimated loss in worker productivity of $867,000, according to Networks Unlimited.

Fear of viruses, spyware, and other security breaches due to non-work-related Web use is another impetus for employers to limit their workers' Internet activity. Such attacks can disrupt company networks and lead to loss of confidential information. But Nancy Flynn, director of the ePolicy Institute and author of Blog Rules and other books on workplace tech policies, says that concern about potential litigation is the main reason organizations manage their employees' Internet use.

Sexually offensive material read or viewed on computers in the workplace can lead to sexual harassment charges or, in extreme cases, bring law-enforcement agencies knocking at the door. a county public Works Department office in Nevada attracted embarrassing attention when an employee was arrested after downloading more than 400 images of child pornography to his work computer. The agency discovered the stash only by tracing a virus that crashed the county's network to one of the images.

The content of e-mail and instant messages can be especially dangerous. In the most recent ePolicy survey results, 24 percent of surveyed companies acknowledged that they had received at least one subpoena for employee e-mail.

"When companies get embroiled in e-mail litigation, it can become very expensive and very embarrassing," says Flynn, who runs seminars on how to establish policies and train employees in proper technology use. The issue can be especially problematic in highly regulated industries, such as health care, where workers are required to adhere to laws that protect the privacy of patient information and records. During an audit of one medical center's computers, Networks Unlimited found that spyware was surreptitiously sending information from the center's network to Gator, a spyware/adware firm, up to 2000 times a day. The audit also uncovered a keystroke-logging Trojan horse on one of the center's workstations.

Segal says that blocking Internet activity can become "somewhat of a political football" if workers feel that Big Brother is watching. "Sometimes you have senior management at one extreme [having] the attitude of blocking it all," he says, "and then you have the other extreme that says 'I don't want to tread there.'"

Balls Foods is an example of a company that starts by blocking all Internet access, and then doles out access to individual workers, case-by-case. The company's network systems manager, Lance Fisher, says that employees haven't complained about the restrictions because they never had unfettered access in the first place. "From the minute that employees have had Internet access, it's always been restricted access," he says. "So they can't miss what they never had." He concedes that it might be harder for a company that's never blocked access to suddenly institute a restrictive Internet policy. Bob Edwards, executive director of Boston law firm Wolf Greenberg, says that his company recognized this possibility when it audited its network and established a new policy. The firm now prohibits use of instant messaging and blocks access to hacker sites, as well as to gambling and gaming sites.

And since the firm specializes in intellectual property cases, it also blocks peer-to-peer networks. Edwards says that the last thing the company wanted was a scandal involving its own employees downloading copyrighted music or videos. "The [potential] headlines of something like that were definitely enough to make us really want to make sure that we had the thing

nailed," Edward says.

Web sites with adult content are also blocked "to make sure that we weren't
saying one thing with our sexual harassment policy and then...allowing free
access to adult Web sites that might be offensive to others," Edwards says.

Wolf Greenberg was careful not to offend employees with its new policy,
however. The firm's audit looked at Internet use in the office as a whole,
rather than targeting individuals, and the data it gathered was anonymized
to protect employees' privacy. "We wanted to let them know that we really
had no intention to look at every site that everyone went to and that we
wanted to manage this with their cooperation," Edwards says.

The law firm also carefully designed a policy that balanced its needs with
those of its employees. For example, it decided not to block eBay and other
shopping sites. "We want to be reasonable," Edwards says. "[The Internet
is] there for them to use, and we expect that they will need to use it on
occasion, but [we also want them] to be sensitive to the level of use."

Flynn of ePolicy insists that companies must take care to explain their
Internet policy clearly to employees and be consistent about enforcing it.
"I've seen cases where organizations...have disciplinary rules in place,
including saying they will terminate violators, and then they don't
terminate anyone," she says. "And there are companies that pick and choose
who they terminate. That just confuses employees," says Flynn.

                    RadioShack Uses E-mail To Fire Employees

RadioShack Corp. notified about 400 workers by e-mail that they were being
dismissed immediately as part of planned job cuts.

Employees at the Fort Worth headquarters got messages Tuesday morning
saying: "The work force reduction notification is currently in progress.
Unfortunately your position is one that has been eliminated."

Company officials had told employees in a series of meetings that layoff
notices would be delivered electronically, spokeswoman Kay Jackson said.
She said employees were invited to ask questions before Tuesday's
notification on a company intranet site.

Derrick D'Souza, a management professor at the University of North Texas,
said he had never heard of such a large number of terminated employees
being notified electronically. He said it could be seen as dehumanizing to
employees.

"If I put myself in their shoes, I'd say, 'Didn't they have a few minutes
to tell me?'" D'Souza said.

Laid-off workers got one to three weeks pay for each year of service, up to
16 weeks for hourly employees and 36 weeks for those with base bay of at
least $90,000, the company said.

The company announced Aug. 10 that it would cut 400 to 450 jobs, mostly at
headquarters, to cut expenses and "improve its long-term competitive
position in the marketplace." RadioShack has closed nearly 500 stores,
consolidated distribution centers and liquidated slow-moving merchandise
in an effort to shake out of a sales slump.

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